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YMCA BREACHING GHETTO BARRIERS
WITH 'THIRD-LANGUAGE' DAY CAMP

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WILLIAM SHER

The belief that learning can be enjoyable is being put to a severe test in Montreal's teeming North End by the International Branch of the Montreal YMCA.

This neglected district, with Park Avenue and St. Viateur as its core, has long been considered a melting pot for new immigrants to Canada.

But, with an increasing number of arrivals clinging tenaciously to their ethnic identities, it has become more like a hotbed of unrelated nationalities.

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The result - a series of ghettos, isolated and unaware of the opportunities existing outside their self-made boundaries, with inhabitants unwilling to join the mainstream of the community.

Language differences are the main barriers to integration.

Most of the foreign-born newcomers to this area recognize that they must learn one of Canada's official languages to earn a living here. For the majority, English is the first choice.

Those who master or acquire a working knowledge of English are habitually reluctant to tackle French. Efforts to interest them

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in learning what would be a third language are greeted with indifference.

The biggest losers are the children, most of whom regard any form of extra study as punishment. "To offset this attitude, we are using the pool, the gym, arts and crafts, music, movies and magazines to help the youngsters learn French," states Kerry Johnston of the International Y's education department.

"The program is designed to bring the language to life by creating an environment that is free from threat, emotional strains and tensions. We operate much like a summer day camp but, as French is the only language used, mastering it becomes a personal objective of the youngsters!"

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Kerry, aged 28 and a former school teacher, insists that true learning and insight cannot be imposed.

"The task of the educator," he maintains, "is not to introduce and enforce facts and skills, but rather to provide an environment in which the student becomes stimulated and motivated.

"He should make his greater experience and knowledge of resources available at all times, but forego the role of condescending authority. While remaining free to make suggestions, he should welcome challenge and be reluctant to act as an enforcer."